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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Mr. Kissinger's Meeting with Members of the Washington Post -- Luncheon -- October 15, 1969

The luncheon was given by Mrs. Graham and included nine leading reporters, including Phil Geyelin, Murray Marder, Chalmers Roberts, Don Oberdorfer, Meg Greenfeld, Ward Just, Carroll Kilpatrick, and Phil Foisie. Ben Bradlee also attended.

The meeting, which was theoretically held under the Lindley Rule but, in fact, came out as deep background, was extremely cordial and the questioning penetrating but friendly. Mrs. Graham called after the meeting and said, "You did sensationally at lunch. I talked to the group after you departed, and the concensus was that you did incredibly well. One comment I specifically wanted you to hear came from Ward Just, a young man who is terribly tough: 'God, he was really persuasive!"

In summary, the questions covered the following subjects:

Rand Studies on Vietnam

In response to questions about Rand studies on Vietnam, Mr. Kissinger said that he was unaware of any current studies by Rand commissioned by the NSC. He reviewed the studies mentioned by Flora Lewis -- on Cuba, Brazil and the Middle East -- and stated the real facts concerning them.

Laird's Statement on Residual Forces

Mr. Kissinger noted that Secretary Laird was talking about contingency planning. Mr. Kissinger made the distinction between residual forces if there were not a negotiated settlement, and our willingness to negotiate the withdrawal of all American troops from Vietnam, in return for withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces. He also noted that there are two conceptual increments in our withdrawals, combat first, and support second.

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Vietnamization and Negotiations

Mr. Kissinger was asked which route he believed we would end up following. He replied that he did not wish to seem misleadingly optimistic, but that he believed something might be coming on the negotiations front. He still believed that they had made a decision last May to keep their options open, including the possibility of negotiating a settlement. We would not have many signs of their willingness to settle until the very moment when they came across with a meaningful move. Indeed, they would probably maintain their harsh stance right up to that moment -- and they are generally harsh now. Once that decision is made, and they begin to negotiate seriously, the basic shape of a settlement can be found within two months.

Relationship of Vietnamization and Negotiated Settlement

Mr. Kissinger showed how progress on Vietnamization improves Hanoi's motivation to negotiate a settlement, but also how Vietnamization requires a strong GVN while a negotiated settlement could require changes in the Government which might weaken it. Thus, in the short run, they are compatible, but in the long run they may be incompatible.

Changes in the GVN

Mr. Kissinger indicated that we are not necessarily bound to Thieu's survival in any settlement, and in fact he might not survive one. But there is absolutely no point, he said, in damaging the GVN in advance of any settlement.

November 3 Speech

Oberdorfer asked if there would be some big announcement in the November 3 speech, such as a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops (by implication, combat troops). Mr. Kissinger did not rule out this possibility in the course of his response, but its thrust was that such an announcement might damage our chances for successful negotiations.

The President and Our Present Policy

Mr. Kissinger noted that the President does not panic in crises. There is an important difference between this Administration and the last -- this Administration is trying to settle the war; the past Administration subordinated everything to trying to win it.

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The Situation in the South

In response to Ward Just's question, Mr. Kissinger said that we do not, perhaps, pay enough attention to what is happening on the ground in the South, perhaps because of his distrust of the statistics. We would soon be studying these more closely. The situation there is certainly an important part of the calculus.

Domestic Opposition -- Moratorium

Mr. Kissinger agreed with the reporters' statements and questions about the importance of domestic events, but disclaimed expertise in the field. He had no argument with the Post's editorials on the Moratorium.

Paris Tactics

Murray Marder suggested spelling out our eight points in detail in Paris to see how they match the other side's 10 points. Mr. Kissinger suggested the problem is not so mechanical. They are serious men who have been fighting a long time. Spelling out our respective proposals will not lead us suddenly to discover that there is nothing to fight about. What is needed is a decision to compromise.

Proposal for Direct US-PRG Talks

Mr. Kissinger agreed with Murray Marder that the tone of the last plenary meeting had been relatively mild. Marder agreed that the object of their call for direct US-PRG talks could only have been to drive a wedge between us and Saigon.

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